

MEMORANDUM

Regarding: Sul Ross State University Website

To: Dr. Carlos Hernández, President, and Dr. Bernie Canteñas, Provost

From: Enrollment, Marketing, and Admissions Working Group

May 6, 2026

The Goal of University Websites

The overarching goal of any university website is simple: the website must convert prospective students into enrolled students. Research confirms that 94% of graduate students and 90% of undergraduates say a university's website directly shapes their enrollment decision - yet SRSU's website is actively working against that outcome^{1,2}

Why Our Website Matters

Our website is not simply an information page—it is our institutional front door. It serves as an admissions office, campus tour, recruiting platform, and student services center. The website is often the first impression a prospective student receives. These students determine the reputation of a university within 10 seconds of visiting that university's webpage³. They decide whether or not to apply in less than 2 minutes³.

Websites directly drive enrollment, with 84% of prospective students saying that a poor website negatively impacts their opinion of a university. A “poor website” can be many things; our website currently does not serve prospective students well because it is nearly invisible to search engines, navigation on the website is difficult, and important information is missing or outdated.

Urgent improvement is needed to address issues with both the back end (technical) and the front end (visible) aspects of our website. A visually attractive site without technical discoverability will not generate traffic; a searchable site with poor usability will not convert visitors into applicants or enrolled students. Beyond these fixes, the website should be subject to a continuous update process. A website should be a living tool that reflects the university well.

Converting Interest into Enrollment

Our website must help prospective students take concrete next steps toward enrollment. A prospect who becomes interested should be able to easily request information, speak with admissions, schedule a campus visit, compare programs, calculate costs, submit

transcripts, begin an application, upload documents, apply for scholarships, and track progress through the admissions pipeline.

Every unnecessary click, broken link, confusing page, or outdated instruction creates friction that can cause a student to abandon the process and choose another institution.

Recommendations

Our working group has conducted front-end and back-end audits of our website. These audits and subsequent recommendations are by no means comprehensive but reflect the most egregious issues with our website. However, at the same time that these issues are serious, most can be fixed relatively quickly and at little to no cost.

Back-end Performance and Discoverability

The website must be structured so that search engines can properly find, understand, and rank our content. Currently, prospective students searching for programs such as criminal justice, biology, teacher education, business, counseling, online degrees, graduate programs, or affordable Texas universities may never see Sul Ross in their search results.

In practical terms, if students cannot find us, they cannot choose us. Strong search engine optimization (SEO) and metadata are essential tools for recruitment and brand visibility.

Barriers to Our Goal: Current Issues with Back-end Support

#	Problem	Impact
1	Search results (Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc.) do not show SRSU pages. For example, searching “nursing programs in Texas” on Google does not bring up SRSU in 40+ pages.	Prospective students cannot find us and do not know we offer programs that interest them.
2	Webpages lack headers (H1), images lack descriptions, metadata is missing, embedded keywords are missing or poor.	These factors deprioritize our websites in search engine results.
3	Our website has poor mobile optimization. When viewed on a mobile device, content does not appear at all or it appears badly distorted.	Most GenX students first access websites from mobile devices. We often use QR codes, which encourages this means of access.
4	The SRSU homepage has a 20.8 second mean load time.	Students get frustrated and move on.
5	Search engine results find the wrong thing, such as blog pages rather than living program pages.	When students do find us on Google, they don’t understand what content they are seeing.

Solutions: Back-end Support

- Must be done now:
 - Each Sul Ross webpage, starting with the homepage, needs H1 headers, proper main titles, photo descriptions, sufficient and succinct metadata, and an embedded keyword strategy.
 - Conduct a Google search page audit to properly modify indexing signals so blog pages don't bog down more important pages in search results.
 - The homepage video size must be reduced to decrease load time and increase mobile optimization. This will also support front-end user experience by creating more webpage space for important content, such as "Apply Now" and other action links that need to appear "above the fold."
 - A monthly Google analytics performance report of the homepage and key subpages should be disseminated. Important metrics to track include unique site visits, page hit volumes, technical speed metrics, bounce rate, session duration, and conversion rates.
- Must be done next:
 - Work with each department to improve website content and choose appropriate keywords.
 - Develop a workflow for college- or department-level website editing.

Front-end User Experience

The website must provide a clear, intuitive, and accessible experience that guides prospective students from interest to enrollment. While back-end optimization ensures students can find us, the front end determines whether they stay, explore, and ultimately apply. Currently, users who reach the Sul Ross website encounter confusion, inconsistency, and barriers that disrupt their decision-making process.

In practical terms, if students cannot easily navigate our site, understand our offerings, or complete key actions such as applying, they will leave and choose another institution. A strong front-end user experience is essential for converting interest into enrollment and ensuring the university presents itself as modern, reliable, and student-centered.

The website should be SRSU's best recruiter. With targeted fixes, it can be.

Barriers to Our Goal: Current Issues with Front-end User Experience

#	Problem	Impact
1	The admissions flow is fragmented. Our website does not list deadlines, there is no persistent "Apply" button, and users are redirected off-site without guidance.	Students enroll elsewhere, or they intend to enroll at SRSU but do not have a sense of urgency and end up missing the deadline.

2	Our website has ADA Accessibility Gaps, including lack of alt-text, low contrast text, and no keyboard navigation, which violates SRSU's own APM 7.06 policy.	We could face legal action under new federal Title II rules. Furthermore, these issues signal users that the university is not built for everyone.
3	The faculty directory is broken. Issues include ghost profiles, missing titles, and faculty listed under the wrong departments.	Prospective students cannot find their future teachers and cannot rely on the information provided by the website.
4	The catalog lists ghost courses and defunct prefixes. For example, the CS/CSST prefixes (which were retired in Summer 2023) are still active with no transition labels.	Students risk transcript discrepancies requiring manual advisor intervention.
5	Our degree programs are not easy to find. There are 25 online programs buried in an unfiltered alphabetical list with no outcomes data to support their value.	Our strongest competitive assets are invisible.
6	Our website has bogged-down horizontal navigation. A user has to click many times and navigate options with ambiguous titles.	Students cannot quickly find the information they need (tuition costs, admissions criteria, etc.).

Solutions: Front-end User Experience

- Must be done now, no budget required:
 - Add a persistent Apply Now button that first leads to a landing page within the SRSU website that coaches potential students through the application process. This landing page should include the following:
 - A clear checklist for admissions
 - A link to tuition and fees
 - A link to scholarships and financial aid
 - A link to admissions criteria and testing

Sam Houston's Admissions page is a reasonable example⁴.
 - Remove ghost faculty.
 - Archive retired course prefixes and point to current courses.
 - Update scholarship deadlines and remove scholarships that are no longer available.
- Must be done now, requires website investment:
 - Build a Future Students portal modeled after peer TSUS institutions (TXST, SHSU). The infrastructure to do this already exists within the system.
 - Improve navigation across the website. Sam Houston State University⁵ and Duke University⁶ are two examples of good navigation, with reduced and to-

the-point options with clear titles, and a hamburger menu for additional detail navigation.

Summary: Institutional Impact

The current limitations of the Sul Ross website have become a serious institutional bottleneck. They restrict our ability to reach prospective students, weaken our public image, complicate retention efforts for current students who rely on the site for services and information, and reduce our competitiveness in an increasingly online educational environment.

Improving the website is not a cosmetic project. It is an enrollment strategy, a retention strategy, a communications strategy, and an institutional growth strategy. For Sul Ross to succeed in recruitment, student success, and long-term sustainability, investing in the website must become a high priority.

References

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